

- ***COMBAT Act removes burden of proof for veterans with physical and mental war wounds -***
- ***Hall's legislation to now be considered by U.S. House of Representatives -***

Washington, DC – This week the full House Veterans' Affairs Committee passed Congressman John Hall's (D-Dover) landmark legislation to increase access to treatment and benefits for veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other injuries. Hall's H.R. 952, Compensation Owed for Mission Based Activities in Theatre (COMBAT) Act, will remove the burden from disabled veterans who have to prove that a specific incident during combat caused his or her disability. Hall's COMBAT Act will make it so that any veteran who served in combat will automatically have the ability to get treatment and benefits for injuries incurred during service.

"Currently there is an onerous burden put on the veteran, especially those diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder to prove combat zone stressors," stated Hall. "Instead of helping these veterans, the VA acts as an obstacle, inflicting upon the most noble of our citizens a process that feels accusatory and disbelieving. The current process is complex, legalistic and protracted, and particularly difficult for veterans because of the stresses and uncertainties involved while facing skeptical and cynical attitudes of VA staff."

The VA's current policy forces veterans to "prove" that a specific stressor during a war triggered their PTSD, even if they have already been diagnosed and been receiving treatment for the condition. Veterans must track down incident reports, buddy statements, present medals, and leap other hurdles to validate to the VA that their PTSD was a result from their war service.

"The current policy violates common sense," stated Hall. "A soldier who does not have PTSD before entering a war, who returns home from war with PTSD, should not have to prove that his PTSD is a result of a specific experience during war. Simply serving in combat can induce PTSD. The wars America is fighting right now have no front or rear lines. Danger can strike in any place, anywhere. It is clear that the current regulations are in need of change."

From Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts alone, over 100,000 veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD. Tragically, however, only 42,000 have been granted service-connected disability for their condition. The disability claims backlog at the Veterans Administration (VA) is topping 900,000. A great many of these claims are Vietnam Veterans seeking compensation for PTSD.

During the House VA Committee's debate on the COMBAT Act, Hall told his colleagues "We can pave the way for today's veterans to receive the same assistance that created the Greatest Generation. Otherwise, we run the risk of allowing veterans and their families to face mental illness, suicide, homelessness, divorce, and unemployment alone. I, for one, won't let that happen. I hope you won't either."

The Committee favorably passed the COMBAT Act, which now goes to the full U.S. House of Representatives for further consideration.

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